

Excerpt from *Wilbur G. Hallauer: An Oral History*

Wilbur G. Hallauer was elected to the state Senate in 1956, the same year that voters passed Initiative 199. Hallauer, a Democrat from the 1st District, had previously served eight years in the House of Representatives. In this excerpt he discusses how he became a champion of I-199, a role that put him in opposition to his party's redistricting leader, R.R. "Bob" Greive. Read the entire text of [Wilbur G. Hallauer: An Oral History](#) on the Oral History Program's Web site.

Thomas Kerr: A particularly vexing issue for the Legislature and one in which you were very deeply involved was that of legislative redistricting. Since there are several different aspects of this issue, perhaps it would be helpful to divide our discussion into a number of interrelated topics. The first would relate to the redistricting initiative sponsored by the League of Women Voters in 1956, Initiative 199. The second would be the attempt to amend the state constitution to place the redistricting function in the hands of an independent commission. And the third area of consideration would be the various redistricting struggles of the 1960s that resulted from the series of United States Supreme Court decisions on redistricting during the early 1960s. And, finally, we should discuss the impact of redistricting upon your own legislative career.

Let's begin with the 1956 Initiative 199. What was your position on that?



Wilbur Hallauer

Senator Hallauer: I was aware that the League had in mind a redistricting measure by initiative, because for several years they had been trying to encourage the Legislature to do something about the malapportionment of legislative districts in the state. But they got brushed aside, so they put it on their agenda as something they would become actively involved in. I received an invitation, I think from Nancy Thomas who was active in the League, to come and attend one of their early meetings. This was before they started collecting signatures. And although I don't know just how Slade Gorton was approached by the League, he was also present at the first meeting, representing the Republicans. I was presumably representing the Democrats.

Mr. Kerr: That was in 1956?

Sen. Hallauer: Yes, it was in early 1956. That was the year in which I was running for the first time for a position in the Senate, but it was something that they knew I was interested in. So I was glad to cooperate and make my suggestions and try to be as helpful as I could. I just thought that redistricting was way past due because the state of Washington had last been redistricted in 1930, by an initiative supported by the Washington State Grange. So here you were, twenty-six years later, and great population changes and increases had occurred. It was simply time that we got on with the constitutionally required duty to redistrict after each census.

The measure that they wrote was really produced during the early months of 1956 by a group that met at Mrs. Nancy Thomas' house and her next door neighbor, Mrs. Lois North. She

was a Republican and Mrs. Thomas was a Democrat. We went through the entire population statistics for the state for the 1950 census and tried to make the best of it with about a ten percent variation permitted in different districts in terms of population. By the way, that's not anywhere near the exactness required by later court action but it was certainly a huge improvement over what then existed.

Anyway, the volunteers of the League took out the petitions and got a sufficient number of signatures to be placed on the November ballot. The voters did approve it quite substantially, but, of course, the result meant that a lot of the people in the Legislature were going to have their districts changed in a way that they didn't like. They were going to get lots of voters who they considered indigestible. So Senator Bob Greive subsequently undertook to put together a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature to overturn the ladies of the League and the popular vote. When I first heard about it, I thought his plan was ridiculous, and I didn't think he could do it.

Mr. Kerr: Before we get into Senator Greive's activity, I'd like to refer to the campaign that the League of Women Voters carried on to get this initiative approved. Do you recall whether the League sought to enlist the support of either of the political parties?

Sen. Hallauer: If the League attempted to gain the support of the political parties, it must have been before taking the initiative route.

Mr. Kerr: What members of the Legislature other than yourself and Slade Gorton were consulted by the League? I'm curious to know whether the League touched a lot of bases or whether it came at the Legislature like some kind of zinger.

Sen. Hallauer: I know there was contact between the League and Senator Greive and I think he refused to cooperate with them in any way. But prior to the election of 1956 he had no official leadership standing. Al Rosellini had been minority leader in the Senate. But I really don't think that there was a great deal of contact by the League with the legislators.

Mr. Kerr: In retrospect, do you think that was a mistake on the part of the League?

Sen. Hallauer: No, because it was a hopeless pursuit.

Mr. Kerr: I was interested particularly in how people in your own district reacted to your support of the initiative. This is obviously a rural area and one that would probably not be helped by the initiative. Did you discuss this with any of the voters during your own Senate campaign that year?

Sen. Hallauer: I remember discussing it at the political level within the Democratic Party.

Mr. Kerr: What was the result of that discussion?

Sen. Hallauer: Well, they didn't do anything about it. It was more of an educational discussion, and I expressed my feeling that this was something that was overdue and, yes, it would change the balance somewhat in favor of the urban areas as opposed to the rural areas. But if you were

going to believe in democratic government, you had to accept the fact that things were changing. That was really my theory and I don't think I got very much support out of it. But people recognized where I stood in relation to it.

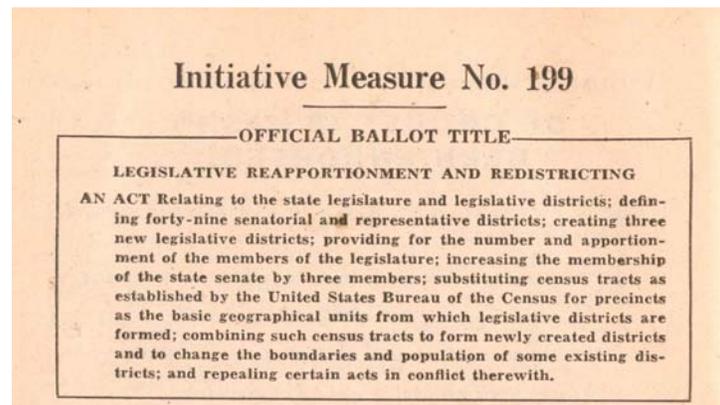
The proposal for our district here, District One was simply that Ferry County be added to Okanogan and Chelan counties. I think it was more a matter of one's vision about what needed to be done to bring about truly democratic representation within the state or the Legislature.

Mr. Kerr: I noticed that Initiative 199 passed statewide by about fifty-four percent, but in some of the eastern Washington counties, the ratio of votes against it was as much as eight to one. You mentioned a few minutes ago that the Grange had been instrumental in earlier redistricting efforts. Did the Grange or the Farm Bureau Federation take a position in 1956?

Sen. Hallauer: The Farm Bureau was certainly against it. I think the Grange equivocated but it worried them.

Mr. Kerr: But, you don't think this affected your race for the Senate at the time or anything?

Sen. Hallauer: No. It didn't become an issue. If it had, it probably wouldn't have done me any good.



This is how I-199 appeared in the 1956 voters' pamphlet. The initiative passed, but the Legislature substantially amended it.

Mr. Kerr: As you've mentioned, the 1956 state ballot was dominated by the Rosellini gubernatorial contest. But there was also a very emotional "right to work" initiative on the same ballot. Organized labor waged a vigorous campaign against it and that produced a very large voter turnout, especially in the western part of the state. Do you think that may have been instrumental in the passage of Initiative 199? Have you thought of that?

Sen. Hallauer: No, I can't say I have; maybe I did at that time, but I don't recall it now. I do remember the issue of the "right to work" and that was a very simple one for me. I certainly thought that the proposal was designed to take away some of the rights of organized labor and that would have resulted in an imbalance of power. So I was very much opposed to the "right to work" initiative.

To me, the real mystery of it all the way through was the inability of the Republican Party leadership in the state to see that their hope of real power lay in suburbia, where middle class America tended to migrate during and after the war. There were huge population increases in places like Bellevue and Redmond and areas north and south of Seattle. In comparison with the cities, the suburbs were terribly under-represented in the Legislature. An easy majority in most of these localities was going to be middle class or upper middle class and would tend to vote for and support the Republican Party. That the Republican leadership would oppose realization of that power in behalf of their own party was difficult to understand. They continued to maintain

the belief in the rural control in the Legislature, because they felt that farmers were always going to be more sympathetic with the aims of the Republican Party. Well, that just wasn't so. The farmers are going to vote Democratic when they're poor, and they're going to vote Republican when they're not poor. That's the way it is. And all they had to do was handcuff the Legislature and then take all of central Washington, a very, very conservative area that was represented in the state Senate by Democrats, largely because of public power issues.

Mr. Kerr: When you came up to the Senate in January of 1957, had Bob Greive just been elected majority leader?

Sen. Hallauer: He was elected at that point.

Mr. Kerr: So his long tenure as majority leader began at that time. Do you think that his desire to hold on to and develop that position as majority leader may have had something to do with the strong position that he took regarding the redistricting matter?

Sen. Hallauer: Oh, I think Bob Greive's ambitions were always pretty well limited to being majority leader in the Senate. I never at any time saw any evidence of any higher ambition on his part. He wanted to be able to control the Democratic majority, and protecting the interests of the Democratic senators by undoing what Initiative 199 had done was a way for him to make friends and protect his flock. I think that's the way he felt about it.

Mr. Kerr: Ordinarily an initiative could not be tampered with for a certain period after it had passed. But a constitutional amendment had been approved by the voters in 1952 that allowed the Legislature to amend an initiative to allow correction of errors or financial impracticalities. Was that the umbrella under which the Legislature emasculated the provisions of Initiative 199?

Sen. Hallauer: That constitutional amendment sounds like something that had to do with welfare measures that had come close to bankrupting the state.

Mr. Kerr: Yes. In 1948 a welfare initiative had unleashed a sea of red ink, and that was the occasion for the constitutional amendment. As far as you know, was Initiative 199 the first occasion in which that new provision of the state constitution was brought into effect?

Sen. Hallauer: I don't remember it ever being done otherwise.